CAN THE BLIND PERSON SERVE INDUSTRY?

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Can the Blind Person Serve Industry?

By J. F. Clunk

JOSEPH FRANCIS CLUNK, LL.B., has a most interesting and unique life history which every reader of his article will wish to read. It may be found on page 5.

TO THE CASUAL observer it seems impossible to find places in ordinary factories in which a blind person can justify his position on a company payroll. Many sighted persons stand aghast at the idea of placing so-called *totally disabled* persons in an atmosphere in which speed and danger seem to be predominant amidst whirring motors and belts.

Objections to the blind in industry vary somewhat according to the interests of the different groups concerned. The employer, for example, visualizes new demands on his first aid room, an increase in his insurance premiums, and even possible public condemnation. The labouring man in his attitude is moved between two emotions: sympathy, on the one hand, for those who lead such *lives of darkness,* and jealousy, on the other, toward the blind man who may be a better workman. The sighted labourer, however, should recognize the fact that every man has the right to an opportunity, provided he can justify the same by performance.

In the placing of blind labour, all factors must be taken into consideration. It is true that a little extra help may be required on the part of a sighted comrade in assisting the blind worker from the gate of the plant to his particular department, and perhaps in going to the rest rooms or to the lunch rooms at noon. But in the final analysis, the blind worker should produce as much per day, week, or month, without any increased expense, as does the sighted employee.

A study of the records of the blind in industry reveals some interesting facts. In thirty-five years of experience in all types of industries, they have yet to file their first compensation claim. *In fact, they have proved to be the safest workmen in any industry.* The reasons are easy to understand.

First, a blind worker is never put upon a job that is really dangerous, although many placements have been made on equipment on which sighted workers have accidents. Second, a blind worker exercises a higher degree of care than does the average sighted workman; and third, any individual who possesses a handicap and who makes an effort to overcome that handicap becomes a more efficient thinking machine. The average sighted workman on production equipment becomes careless and takes unnecessary chances with resultant injuries. He frequently feels that his foreman's instructions are impertinent and that guards impede his production. Consequently, he makes every effort either to remove the guard or to nullify its principles. On the other hand, the blind workman accepts instructions at face value and follows them precisely, because he dares not take chances.

When working on machinery such as drill presses, milling machines, turret lathes, and grinders, the blind worker always observes the limits placed on his movements. For example, if he is operating a milling machine on which he has a half-inch clearance between the jig and the cutters, his procedure is always the same. If perchance his fingers come in contact with the cutters, his automatic and instantaneous *reverse*

comes into play, and his fingers are removed from the danger before injury can occur. Perhaps we can liken this to a common experience that most people have had.

If you are a sighted person, you have, undoubtedly, crashed into a wall or a door in your home in the dark. The impact itself did not cause you any injury, but your momentum and your *inability to reverse instantly,* carried you into the object with a resultant jar that disturbed you considerably. The blind person, having this experience every day, learns to bounce off the obstacle without the jar and disturbance which you experienced.

This was illustrated very definitely one day in a factory demonstration in which a blind worker was successfully operating a large grinding wheel. The superintendent of the factory thought he observed the blind worker's hands come in contact with the stone at least a dozen times in the course of the demonstration, and he perceived that no injury was suffered. After the demonstration, the superintendent touched the grinder in what he thought was the same manner, with the result that he had to visit the first aid room. The explanation incorporates the same principle as referred to above. When the blind workman's hands came close enough to the grinder to feel the current of air created by the spinning stone, he exercised care not to trespass further into forbidden territory; but in those instances when his fingers did come close enough to touch the stone, he withdrew instantly, although only sufficiently to avoid a contact that would cause injury. The observing superintendent had not analyzed what was happening, and consequently, erred in his conclusions.

There are also other processes that have not been thoroughly studied in the ordinary factory in respect to what may constitute a dangerous procedure. For example, most superintendents, if asked which hand he would use to touch a moving drill when guiding it into the various holes of a movable jig, will reply, "Neither."

The facts of the case are that the right hand of the operator must always be kept on the drill handle, but the left hand is free to touch the side of the drill, and when done in this manner, the turn of the worm has a tendency to throw the fingers away from it. It requires only a very light touch to guide the drill into the proper part of the jig, and a short period of operation teaches the blind person at what angle and distance to move the jig so as to line it up exactly with the drill and thereby reduce the amount of contact by touch.

Every industry has its processes which are thoroughly practical for the blind workman. The automotive industry has hundreds of machine processes as well as many others, such as stuffing cushions, putting tires on wheels and inflating them, assembling seat frames, and assembling body parts with the use of power tools. A brief list of opportunities offered by other industries includes the manufacture of such articles as candy, sausage, weiners, wood and paper boxes, cement, boots and shoes, nuts and bolts, and electrical appliances. Kindred industries, using the same or similar apparatus as that used by the above, have, of course, the same possibilities. The primary objective is to find operations at which manual dexterity plus ordinary judgment and application are essential, but at which the operator without sight may perform normally.

If moving about the plant is required to secure raw material or to dispose of

finished produets, then partial sight is necessary. An individual with anywhere from five to ten per eent sight ean easily meet these requirements. For example, there is a young man possessing eight per eent sight employed in a large plant building special crates and boxes. The foreman reports that he is not eonscious of the man's visual limitations insofar as his work is eoneerned. This employee has been on the job for six and one-half years and has never had the slightest approach to an aeident.

Consequently, it would seem that the blind have proved their right to more eonsideration than they have reeeived in the past. In other words, if in any given industry one proeess out of a thousand is praetieal for blind persons, that proeess should be reserved for them. Sighted labour having the nine hundred ninety-nine ehanees should not begrudge the blind individual of his one.

In the United States, there is approximately one employable blind person in every five thousand of population, and each of these individuals could and should be normally employed and normally absorbed in ordinary industry. Before this ean be done, however, several things must be aeeomplished. First, prejudiee will have to be eliminated; seeond, the sighted world must modify its eonception of the degree of handieap involved in physieal blindness; and third, social agencies, in order to bring about the most satisfaetory results, should add to their staffs blind persons trained in the business of job analysis and vocational guidanee and plaeement.

A little better understanding of the whole situation and a fuller cooperation on the part of our sighted friends would go a long way toward solving the problem, thereby lifting many blind persons out of a tolerated existence of dependent idleness into a new day of real living.

JOSEPH FRANCIS CLUNK

National Supervisor of Industrial Employment
Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Toronto, Ontario

Joseph Franeis was born in the State of Ohio. After high sehool graduation in 1915, he entered the Western Reserve University of Cleveland, but diseontinued his studies there after two years on aeeount of progressive near-sightedness. It was the theory of his oeulist that continued study would result in blindness and total disability.

True to prophesy, Mr. Clunk did lose his sight in February, 1919, but his perseverance and determination helped him to eompensate for his handieap and within a month he was able to travel alone in the city of Cleveland. By April, he had started his own rehabilitation program, selling commodities to domestie eustomers and business houses.

Mr. Clunk's interest, however, was in the possibilities of rendering a serviee rather than in a personal eareer in some other field. Consequently, he began to do volunteer soeial work on Saturday afternoons for the Cleveland Soeiety for the Blind, and soon afterwards was invited to join the staff of that organization. This he did on January 1, 1920, and although he had had no faetory experienee or meehanieal training prior to blindness, he qualified to do placement work and to give demonstrations in thirty-eight Cleveland faetories.

August 1, of that year, he became exeeutive seeretary of the Youngstown,

Ohio, society. During spare time he studied law at night school, and was admitted to practice at the close of 1925. This practice he conducted in conjunction with social work until May, 1928, when he moved to Canada to accept the position he now occupies.

His present duties range from designing and installing all sorts of refreshment stands in factories and public buildings to traveling without a guide thousands of miles yearly, conducting industrial surveys, and administering and supervising the work in the various provinces.

Last year his department produced payroll benefits of approximately six and one-half times the amount of public subsidy involved, and during the past six years these payrolls have aggregated some six hundred thousand dollars to the blind people of Canada.

Mr. Clunk is the contributor of the article on page 3 of this issue entitled, *Can the Blind Person Serve Industry?* His reply to his own inquiry is most revealing.

SIGHT SAVING TRAINING COURSES

THE SUMMER session of 1935 courses for the training of teachers and supervisors of sight-saving classes will be offered at the institutions and under the instructors indicated below:

Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio; Olive S. Peek, supervisor of sight-saving classes of Northern Ohio, Board of Education, Cleveland, Ohio; June 24-August 2.

State Teachers College, Buffalo, New York; Mattie M. Carter, supervisor of sight-saving classes, State Education Department, Albany, New York; July 1-August 9.

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York; Winifred Hathaway, associate director, National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, 50 West 50 Street, New York City, July 8-August 16.

Details regarding the courses may be obtained from the university or college offering the courses, or from the respective instructors in charge.

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